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THE LADY OF THE BLACKFRIARS

OR, THE OLD PLAY

BY

CLINTON ROSS



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BINGHAMTON, N. Y., U. S. A.



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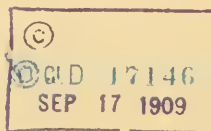
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In the Hills, at Binghamton.

C. R.

*Go, little Book,
And tell a Tale,—
Untold,
Of Shakespeare's Play.
The Mimic World
Was Theirs
And all It Knew.*

It delighted the servants of My Lord Chamberlain to style themselves Black Friars, both because the first theatre of most repute stood in The Blackfriars, and because of the old monks, who, once, like their light successors, had been housed in that locality of London. And as we know in this later day,—and as men thought in Elizabeth's reign,—they, too, served the grace and splendour of Providence.

Now it chanced,—as I have found in the old manuscript of Sir Robin Fitzmaurice of River Avon,—that a certain Countess was enamoured of plays and players to such an extent, as Sir Robin's Book shows, as to be styled the Lady of the Black Friars,—a title I find elsewhere (on what authority I will not state, as these Shakespearians are often such implacable fellows) first given her by Master Edward Alleyn, England's greatest player, who out of his earning endowed as devoutly as any Friar of the Old Black order, the splendid College at Dulwich which stands to-day before God and man as evidence of his piety,—his true love of his fellows. No player that I know has given more,—to his Age the consummate acting,—to posterity a living gift.

This Book, after a long while dallying with Shakespeare's younger days,—tells the Tale of the Lady, following much the Book of the Novel.

PROLOGUE

A Forest in Warwickshire.

Anne Hathaway and her husband in the Forest. She is loading Play-Books and a luncheon into a hamper.

ANNE—You killed the deer.

SHAKESPEARE—And now to London, and the Bur-bages.

ANNE (putting play-books into hamper)—Dear thoughts and verses of my Lover,—bear him merrily on the road! Protect and guide him! Bring him fortune and cheer! Thoughts that grew with him in Arden,—rise and hold a World! Mine and His.

REFERENCE NOTES:

Argument:—A certain Countess becomes enamoured of plays and players and is styled by them the Lady of the Black Friars.

Note first:—The first principal play-house in Elizabeth's reign was in the Blackfriars where in old times there had been a monastery of the black order of Dominicans. The players sometimes styled themselves Black Friars.

Note Second: Act I. Scene II. The young Shakespeare, inspired by his love of masques, church festivals, and the plays produced in inn-yards, and at Kenilworth, and other mansions, joined the players in June, 1586. The following February Mary of Scotland was executed at Fotheringay. It is related that all who could resorted to Fotheringay as to a festival, and mummers, mountebanks and players to amuse them.

Note Third:—Act I. Scene II. The licensed players, the Lord Chamberlain's Servants, were required, monthly, or, frequently, to present plays at the chapels of Greenwich or Whitehall Palaces, at functions. The players were conversant with the Court, and its gossip. For authority see "Hamlet," and the mimic play.

Note Fourth:—Act II. The great mansions of the period were on the Strand, with entrances from barges on the Thames. Fops and courtiers often brought plays to the players.

Note Fifth:—Act IV. The request made by Elizabeth to produce a play on Queen Anne, her mother, is a historical tale.

Note Sixth:—The play would show in a series of stage pictures the real career of Shakespeare; while, with Act II, the Tale of the Play—Mad Countess predominates it.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Sir Robin Fitzmaurice, of Avon, a courtier.

Richard Burbage, player and manager under the Lord Chamberlain.

Master Shakespeare, a player, dramatist and poet.

Sir Walter Raleigh, guardian under the Crown of the Countess Ylverton and Severn.

Patch, an old clown attached to the Ylverton household.

Bartholomew, a page of the same.

Barby, a servant of the same.

Jem Fairbrother, a groom of Sir Robin's.

The Earl Wimbledon.

Players, courtiers, rustics, etc.

Ino, Countess Ylverton and Severn.

Dame Shepperton, her housekeeper and duenna.

Elizabeth, Queen of England.

Julia Throgmorton (afterward Lady Fitzmaurice).

A Maid-of-the-Inn.

The Fairy Queen (in Act. V.).

A Hostess.

A Flower-Girl.

Countess March, a Lady-in-Waiting.

Anne Hathaway Shakespeare (in Prologue).

THE ACTS

The Prologue: A Forest in Warwickshire.

ACT I

The Prelude. The Endangered Lovers.

Scene I. An Elizabethian road-inn.

Scene II. The stage, chapel, Whitehall Palace.

ACT II

The Play-Mad Maid.

Scene I. An interior, Ylverton House, Strand.

Scene II. The same, the same evening.

ACT III

The Flower-Girl of Blackfriars.

Scene I. A playhouse, Blackfriars, in the Blackfriars.

ACT IV

The Queen's Poet.

Scene I. The interior, Ylverton House Strand (as Act II.)

ACT V

The Roses. How Lady Ylverton came to Stratford Church.

Scene I. The interior, Stratford Church.

There are: *Five acts; seven scenes; six stage-settings.*

THE PLAY BOOK OF
THE LADY OF THE BLACKFRIARS, OR, THE OLD
PLAY

ACT I

The Prelude. The Endangered Lovers.

SCENE I.—(An interior of an Elizabethian road-inn on the road from Fotheringay. Windows and door rear. A fireplace right, with candles in sconces and mugs on the mantle. Half over-turned benches. Through the windows a wild snowy landscape, and falling snow. Enter Sir Robin supporting Julia Throgmorton, and followed by his groom, Jem Fairbrother. They are as if from the saddle, and covered with snow and mud.)

SIR ROBIN—Queen Mary of Scots is dead, dear. And we who loved the murdered Queen must run for our lives. But cheer ye, dear Lady, there's the Sea, and Virginia, and kindly savages. We are in no worse plight than a boy of our shire whom I met on the road from Oxford,—a queer mad boy with a wife to think about,—on the way to London to join Burbage's players.

JULIA—And his name?

SIR ROBIN—Will Shakespeare.

JEM FAIRBROTHER—It's a long cold night; and it's more than frostish, sir.

(A drunken song from left.)

The Queen has gone to Heaven.

The Queen has us seven.

JEM—There's more sack than rhyme in reason.

SONG:

The Queen has gone to Heaven.

The Queen has us seven.

Players we,—

Ever free.

Flogged some days,

For poorest plays,—

Hissed and cheered and rhymed,

Players we,

To Mary free.

In Heaven!

Oh Queen of mine,

Your play is done,

And life is but a stage.

Players we,—

Ever free,—

Servants of the Crown.

(Enter Burbage, Shakespeare, and the players, in various states of intoxication or weariness.)

POT-BOY (with them)—By Holy Mary, three more travellers!

SIR ROBIN (advancing into the fire-shine)—You are far from London, Master Burbage.

BURBAGE—By the Lord, Sir Robin! We have been seeking sight-seers' pence; no tragedy but will bring your tragedian.

SONG:

*A man and his lass
May give us a glass,
'An' he will.
'An' he will.*

SIR ROBIN—That he will. (And to Julia.) They are players of the Blackfriars.

JULIA (acknowledging and saluting them)—Gentlemen I have met at Court. But have you with you one, Master Shakespeare, of whom Sir Robin has spoken.

SHAKESPEARE (advancing and bowing deeply)—'Tis I, Madam. Sir Robin, my salutation. The land is a-sad with tragedy. A jovial cup to the lips, and it reached to our heads,—but mouthily, Sir Robin,—mouthily.

SIR ROBIN—Ah, if we might travel in your company?

SHAKESPEARE—We see naught to hinder. Eh, Dick? (to Burbage.)

BURBAGE—Justices! Justices.

SIR ROBIN—At the least you will breakfast,—with my Lady and me.

BURBAGE—Lady Fitzmaurice?

JULIA—Yes, Lady Fitzmaurice. Justices, said you, Master Burbage, we go to the Queen in London. So why indeed may we not have so good an escort?

BURBAGE—My Lady, you shall have.

JULIA—But as players, Master. Come, sir, lend me out of your trumpery, a page's dress.

SHAKESPEARE—Dick, these be Warwickshire folk; and once Sir Robin helped me on the London road.

BURBAGE (after hesitating)—I grant it. I grant it. And why—? Sir Robin, life is a game. If your Lady find favour of Her Majesty, we shall have won another good patron. And they relate that Her Majesty has pardon,—

full pardon for many. The scaffold is drunken with blood, and must be sobered. Come with us, sir. And you, My Lady. Madam, in so perilous a time 'tis well to wear disguise, and if your Ladyship will deign you may have the player's dress.

JULIA—I have played the boy ere this. In sooth I shall like it. Then, Sir Robin, you can no longer deceive me with your wooing.

BURBAGE (to the players)—Gentlemen, these be ours. For why should not we who beg of a patron, give to a patron.

(Daylight has been gathering through the windows, dimming the candles and fire-shine. Enter Hostess who curtesies. Julia starts to follow her out right.)

JULIA (at door right, bowing to all)—Good-morning.

(She followed by Hostess goes out right. Enter Inn-Maid left. The players and Burbage, yawning, and drowsily, go out left. Inn-Maid advances to mantle above fire-place and takes down the mugs, one by one polishing them. Shakespeare, Sir Robin and the Inn-Maid are now alone on the stage.)

INN-MAID (polishing a mug)—

Shine, shine, shine,

For lips and wine.

Shine, shine, shine,

Ye mugs of mine.

SHAKESPEARE—Sir Robin, does not Her Majesty, being Majesty, know mercy. I've fallen much since I saw you, into consideration of that nature we call "human." Stir the heart of Majesty to mercy, and it shall be. I've had from Kempe, who is a clown at Court, that the Queen is doubly distraught over your Lady's desertion, and that she then called out that all had abandoned her. And I know

what all gossips declare, that now her cousin, the Queen, is dead, Her Majesty will give favour to Queen Mary's friends rather than her enemies; that in sooth is the nature of erring women and of most potent queens, who are but woman-hearted under crown and jewel.

SIR ROBIN (rather jeering him)—How wise you have become!

SHAKESPEARE—Must I not know a muse of fire, man,—must I not woo her ever? For believe me, the Muse lives, as truly the Boeotians knew. But (laughing) have not I a wife? I tell you truly, Sir Robin, that My Lady, coming penitently to the Queen, might secure her pardon, and your own, which provokes me to the plot. (He calls to the Inn-Maid) A pot of Canary! (Inn-Maid curtesies, and goes out left.) You go on to the danger of the road, Tower and block. Should you escape these, you have the strange adventures of strange countries. Now Cupid, Lord of Love and Chance, brings you to us on the road. And it chances that we play Wednesday, week, before Her Majesty at Whitehall. Suing for audience, your Lady would be arrested, and cast to oblivion. Coming on the Queen un-awares,—from our chests,—a page become a woman, she will cast herself before Her Majesty, with "Forgive? Forgive, Majesty of England."

JULIA (at door right beyond fireplace)—Robin!

SIR ROBIN—Julia, if the rector of Saint Mary, Southwark, be a true man, we shall be married there.

JULIA—An' they never catch us!

SIR ROBIN (embracing her)—An' they never catch us.

(Enter Inn-Maid left with pot of Canary, which she places on a bench, and resumes her scrubbing of the mugs.)

JULIA—I heard Master Shakespeare, at the door-sill. We even will do as he says, Robin.

SHAKESPEARE—My word on it, Sir Robin,—going to the Queen you shall have pardon,—I say you shall. Who am I? At least, sir, a player-king, and all the world's a stage. Listen to me, man, going to France, you leave English fortune. And why to Virginia and the barbarian world when your Lady already has her fortune made with the Queen.

SIR ROBIN—But the Tower?—the block?

SHAKESPEARE—You shall have naught of these, I promise you.

SIR ROBIN (taking his hand)—I take your promise, Master King.

INN-MAID (singing at her work)—

Love and life and cheer,—

Freedom from fear!

Love and life and cheer!

So shine, shine, shine,

Ye pots of mine.

CURTAIN

SCENE II.—(A stage, chapel, Whitehall Palace. The real audience look through a mimic stage onto the seats arranged before it for the mimic audience. On the mimic stage as the curtain rises are seen at right, so as if slightly hidden from mimic audience, Shakespeare, Sir Robin, Julia, in a Court gown, and Burbage. Music, and a procession of musicians, with viol and tabor, enter at broad doors rear, preceding the Court, the Queen,—who seat themselves, first the Queen on a raised seat, then the Court,—then at rear the musicians.)

JULIA—How fine their struts and their talk, Robin. I know them all. And the poor Queen,—God defend us, Robin. Did we not try to save Queen Mary because she

seemed our Queen's heiress? Shall the Queen slay us for brave thought and deed? Farewell, Master Shakespeare. Thou hast been a good friend.

(Julia advances through front of the mimic stage into the mimic audience, and kneels before the Queen.)

SHAKESPEARE—If she wins, I win, and am player-king. Who cares for England, shall in England have his care. And see, Burbage, the Queen observes her! Good Dick, my play! Tragedy shall it be, or comedy?

JULIA (before Queen Elizabeth)—And I have returned, Madam.

SHAKESPEARE—Tragedy, oh Burbage!

BURBAGE—Tremble not so, Will.

JULIA—And I have returned.

SHAKESPEARE—Poor Lady! How poor a play-maker I!

JULIA (before the Queen)—I have returned.

SHAKESPEARE—Mercy dwellest thou in queen's hearts? Is this poor humanity all cruel and unforgiving? Yet, oh Burbage, Majesty is in our Elizabeth.

THE QUEEN (at last)—Girl, have you dared to come back to an old woman who loved you?

SHAKESPEARE—Oh, Majesty of England!

(The Queen, leaning forward, raises Julia, and motions her to a seat at her left, and perceives Sir Robin, who has stepped out from front of mimic stage into the mimic audience.)

THE QUEEN—Come hither, Sir Robin (and to the Court.) These two lovers, now wedded, served my murdered heiress, and served me,—England.

(Then with a great voice to the Lord Chamberlain) On with the Play, Lord Hunsdon. (The Lord Chamberlain then raises his hand a signal to Burbage on the mimic stage, when the players enter right and left of mimic stage for the Play.)

SHAKESPEARE—The Play,—my Play has been played at Court.

And all the World was young anew.

And all the Earth of Sparkling dew.

BOY (interrupting him)—You are wanted in the prompter's box, Master Shakespeare.

(The Prologue in the mimic play advances to the front of the stage, while the Court musicians in the mimic audience strike up. The mimic audience is in attitudes of expectancy, but some courtiers and ladies titter and talk.)

CURTAIN

ACT II

The Play-Mad Maid

SCENE I.—(Ylverton House Strand,—an interior, stately, and pretentious, but dilapidated. Lady Ylverton, shabbily gowned, on a bench, the floor about her scattered with play-books. She has a book on her lap, and is turning the leaves. On a table at the right is more books, a tankard, glasses, and riding gloves.)

LADY YLVERTON—It is my play now,—this Twelfth Night. Oh, World! Oh, World! Patch. Yes, I have made of Twelfth Night a better play than he made it,—almost as good a play as my own tragedy of Helen of Troy.

PATCH (entering right)—I am here, Minion.

LADY YLVERTON—Patch will you suffer me to receive the players from Blackfriars dressed as a gentleman in some of my Lord's, my Father's clothes? He had no more figure than I.

PATCH—When your Lady turns gentleman.

LADY YLVERTON—No, no, no, dear Patch. 'Tis not that, but here's business matters to be done.

PATCH—Play-books and stories! Od, zooks, Lady, you are son of the late Lord. As he had no son, art thou both Earl and Countess Ylverton. So why should I say nay? Yet I would wear a sword by my side, to ask respect.

LADY YLVERTON—I, too, shall wear a sword, like Earl Ylverton.

PATCH—As Earl Ylverton descends female by grant of King John, I see no denial to your right.

LADY YLVERTON—I shall bear the name of,—why not Lord Ylverton?—the brother I dreamed of, and never had,—that Harry of Ylverton and Severn. By the Lord Harry, I'll be Earl Harry. As God granted me no brother, he shall have in me both brother and sister. They leave me here as I am,—alone. They are paid,—both Queen and rascal clerks. But they will talk if I so appear, and take me as masquerador, and,—oh, shame!—find me out. But the Play?

PATCH—The World's the World,—not play-book.

LADY YLVERTON—As the World's the World shall Earl Ylverton carry Thomas Carstars' play of the most delectable Lady Helen before Master Burbage,—when he arrives. But care you well, Patch, Dame Shepperton is woman. She must not know, nor Darby. You gossip, Patch.

PATCH—Over sack, Lady.

(Lady Ylverton goes out hurriedly right. Patch stretches himself on a bench and yawns. After a while a knocker, and then a gong. Patch rises, stretches himself, and opens door rear on Burbage, and Shakespeare. They seat themselves. Presently Lady Ylverton enters right, attired as a courtier, nods to her visitors, and selects two books from the pile on the floor.)

LADY YLVERTON—There are here two manuscripts,—one I hold highly. The other I do not so much care about. One, sir (to Burbage) is the "Most Tragical History of Helen of Troy." The other I do not care for so much is called "Twelfth Night."

BURBAGE—There are so many gentlemen bringing us plays, sir.

LADY YLVERTON—This, sir, is written by the Vicar of Ylverton—Forest—on Thames,—an honest fellow whom I'd not have the Muses destroy.

BURBAGE—I have no time.

LADY YLVERTON (dismally)—Yet, sir.

PATCH (excitedly)—Know you, rascally knave of a clown and player, that you address the Earl Ylverton and Severn.

BURBAGE—Lord help me, I never heard of Your Lordship. I will refer you to our reader and poet and dramatist. Will! The Earl Ylverton, Master Shakespeare.

LADY YLVERTON—But what, pray, is who I am to do with two good plays?

SHAKESPEARE—Ah, nothing, my Lord. You give me exceeding pleasure.

LADY YLVERTON—Then look at these!

SHAKESPEARE—Written by you?

LADY YLVERTON—Written by my sister.

SHAKESPEARE—It says here by "Thomas Carstars."

LADY YLVERTON—She stole the name of our Vicar of Ylverton.

SHAKESPEARE (scanning a book)—What have you here? This is my Twelfth Night.

LADY YLVERTON—Lord help you, sir. 'Tis your Twelfth Night.

SHAKESPEARE—The copy I left on the bench in the play-house after Burbage had refused it.

LADY YLVERTON—And my sister's servitors, ordered by her, stole it. Oh, sir, would you cast the Muse aside because men mock her? And I have studied it,—so that I know every line of Viola. You will notice I have changed the part which you did poorly. I crave the privilege of showing Mr. Burbage that the Play can be acted. Turn, sir, to Act III, Scene I, and read the Clown. (And to Viola). "Save thee, friend, dost thou live by thy tabor?"

SHAKESPEARE (answering as Clown)—"No, sir, I live by the Church."

LADY YLVERTON (as Viola)—“Art thou a Churchman?”

SHAKESPEARE (as Clown)—No such matter, sir; I do live by the church; for I do live at my house, and my house doth stand by the Church.” But (dropping the part) you are a player my Lord.

LADY YLVERTON—Then will Mr. Burbage essay “Twelfth Night” with me as Viola?

SHAKESPEARE—He will,—he shall, my Lord.

LADY YLVERTON—I’ll pay for it, Burbage. Here is coin (taking out a purse.) Coin minted by the late King Edward, but gold of the realm.

BURBAGE—You shall have your will, my Lord.

LADY YLVERTON—At it then. I say, at it!

BURBAGE—This day, fortnight.

LADY YLVERTON—Very well, Master Shakespeare, we of Ylverton stole your Play, and we return it to you. But of myself,—well mention my name, as “Thomas Carstars,” if it please you. Ah, sirrah, I have studied your play to the tune of birds and the swaying flow of Thames.

(Darby throws back door rear, and enters, but pauses with uncontrollable laughter at sight of his Mistress in courtier’s clothes.)

DARBY (at last)—Sir Walter Raleigh, Lady Ylverton’s guardian.

(Sir Walter pauses at door in astonishment at the sight of the strange youth. Lady Ylverton snatches a riding glove from the table, and tosses it in his face.)

LADY YLVERTON—Yes, “Lord Ylverton,” Sir Walter. And the account-books of an estate?

SHAKESPEARE (in amazement, as Raleigh’s hand goes to his sword)—Sir Walter this boy is player, “Thomas Carstars” by name. And as players are lords, kings, ladies,

imagines himself "Lord Ylverton." Come, Tom Carstars, pout not so,—put up your sword!

SIR WALTER—But he has used the name Ylverton,—of which I am guardian.

LADY YLVERTON (filling a glass from the tankard on the table and raising it to her lips)—To "Twelfth Night," good Will. (And turning to Raleigh) Ah, Sir Walter, know you not fate?

SIR WALTER (mollified)—Which has made me a strange tale.

LADY YLVERTON—You never saw your ward. But come to-night to Ylverton House, Strand, and you shall see her. And (to the players) you, gentlemen, call an hour after about the matter we have discussed,—which, if you can make it, will be eight o'clock.

CURTAIN

SCENE II.—(The same, the same evening, but brilliantly lit, and arranged. Dame Shepperton, in a flowered gown. And Darby, and Patch,—in livery. Lady Ylverton in a Court gown.)

DAME SHEPPERTON—Beautiful. Ylverton lives again. Yet it is seemly that My Lady should have a duenna. And why not I? In King Henry the VIII.'s time we Sheppertons were gentlefolk.

LADY YLVERTON (kissing her)—You look like a dear, Dame,—like a fine bird of Spring.

DAME SHEPPERTON—At my years! I have heard the Earl, your Father say,—and he had learning,—that Love was a blind person.

LADY YLVERTON—A blind young person, Dame, who wore a handkerchief over his eyes, lest their glow drive all

the World mad. Am I mad? Ah, the knocker. (It clangs and gong sounds.) Darby, a guest. Am I mad,—who must be found out,—to be in one both brother and sister?—lest the Queen send Countess Ylverton to the Tower, and take this good house away.

DARBY (at the door)—Lord Wimbledon.

WIMBLEDON (advancing)—I was sent on before.

LADY YLVERTON—My brother was called away. So I receive you. But I miss Sir Walter Raleigh, my guardian. Dame Shepperton, my companion.

(The Dame makes a deep curtesy.)

WIMBLEDON—I believe Sir Walter follows with the Queen.

LADY YLVERTON (faintly)—With the Queen?

WIMBLEDON—Madam,—what's the matter?

LADY YLVERTON—Some wine, Dame.

DAME SHEPPERTON—Quick, Darby, a glass of wine.

LADY YLVERTON (taking the wine)—Pardon. The excitement of the day. I think I am better. Thank you, Darby. Her Majesty comes to me instead of summoning me to Court?

WIMBLEDON—Her Majesty is curious to see the heir of her great house of Ylverton in his own mansion,—to establish his claim beyond peradventure.

LADY YLVERTON (dully)—Beyond peradventure?

DARBY (at the door)—Her Majesty, the Queen of England, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the Court.

(Elizabeth, impulsively departed from a function at Whitehall, sweeps into the room, a Marchioness bearing her train, followed by Sir Robin, Julia, Raleigh, and others.)

DAME SHEPPERTON (awed)—Kneel, Madam,—kneel!

LADY YLVERTON (with a deep curtesy)—My house has honour to-night beyond all other houses in England.

ELIZABETH (to Raleigh)—Hast thou hid this jewel? I'll gibbet you for this, sir. You are very beautiful, Countess Ylverton, and the richest heiress of England.

LADY YLVERTON (curtesying)—Your Majesty's words are sweet to me.

ELIZABETH—But the Earl, your brother?

LADY YLVERTON—Has departed.

ELIZABETH—Produce him! Produce him!

LADY YLVERTON—May I myself run to see if he be returned?

QUEEN ELIZABETH—Why not send a servant?

LADY YLVERTON—With Your Majesty's permission, I will seek him myself,—lest hastily returned,—if he be returned,—he may not be properly attired for the Majesty of England.

(And without waiting denial, she runs out, right.)

ELIZABETH—These Ylvertons defied my Father, King Henry. This girl must have a Lady over her. I appoint you, Lady March. But why does she not return? (After a long pause) Send for her. Shall England wait for her?

(Lady Ylverton enters at last, dressed in courtier's costume as Earl Ylverton.)

LADY YLVERTON (as the Earl)—Your Majesty's pardon, I had no expectation of this honour.

ELIZABETH—Ah, thou art a handsome fellow. And like sister,—like brother. Sir Walter, the tale is true. He bears his birth,—if it be legal. Have you birth certificates, my Lord?

LADY YLVERTON—Madam, I shall prove who I am.

ELIZABETH—But the girl, your sister?

LADY YLVERTON—She is taken sudden ill.

LADY MARCH—The excitement,—the great honour,—have overpowered Her Ladyship. Her Gracious Majesty

has appointed me to attend her. And I beg Your Lordship to show me her apartment.

LADY YLVERTON—No, Madam, I prefer not.

ELIZABETH—It's my order.

LADY YLVERTON—Your Majesty shall be obeyed in all things, but not in this.

ELIZABETH—You dare me, sir. (But her manner softens. She extends her hand, which Lady Ylverton kisses.) His Lordship is right, Lady March. A Lady who is indisposed is best with old attendants. Come, my Lord, with me to Whitehall. Thy face,—the face of thy twin sister,—is thy birth certificate. The noble house of Ylverton shall rise again in Tudor right.

JULIA—LADY FITZMAURICE (whispering). A new favourite.

LADY YLVERTON (faintly)—A boon?

ELIZABETH—Ask.

LADY YLVERTON—That I may first speak with my sister.

ELIZABETH (simply)—We will wait, sir.

(Lady Ylverton goes out right. The Court whisper, titter and chatter. But Elizabeth now waits patiently. Presently Lady Ylverton, attired as a Lady, enters very slowly and humbly, right.)

LADY YLVERTON—Your Majesty, I am Ino Ylverton. There is no Earl, my brother. It is but I. I, Countess Ylverton and Severn. You left me neglected. Can you blame me? But I blame you not. I was left freedom,—freedom,—these ladies of the Court never knew.

ELIZABETH (in awe)—Lady Ylverton! We leave this house, Sir Walter. The estates of Ylverton shall be administered as they have been by the Queen's stewards, and by yourself,—unti lthis girl is married. I withdraw your appointment, Lady March. My Lord of Wimbledon shall woo her

this night, and shall marry her this week fortnight. Such a girl needs a husband. Come, I have kept his French Majesty's envoy waiting because of this matter.

(The Queen and escort sweep out rear, leaving Wimbledon.)

WIMBLEDON (advancing to Lady Ylverton)—I love Your Ladyship.

LADY YLVERTON—Love is cool.

WIMBLEDON—I know not well what to say.

LADY YLVERTON—Love is not warm, say I. Why say it?

WIMBLEDON—I am bidden to say it.

LADY YLVERTON—If I fall into your arms, I shall scratch your eyes out.

WIMBLEDON—Don't, I entreat you. But it's proper.

LADY YLVERTON—To fall into your arms. Ah me, I warn you, should I be forced to marry you, I shall make the Queen divorce you. I love you deeply,—as deeply as a shallow pool that holds no fish.

WIMBLEDON—I will come this day fortnight.

LADY YLVERTON—Oh, the ceremony! Then get you to France or to America,—where Spaniards kill,—out of my sight.

WIMBLEDON—I will call to-morrow.

LADY YLVERTON—I shall be in the country.

WIMBLEDON—Your Ladyship, I will call, when I may.
(Goes out rear.)

PATCH (at the same rear door)—The players, Lady,—the players you bade call at this hour.

LADY YLVERTON—Oh, I had forgot. Show them in.
(Shakespeare and Burbage enter rear.)

SHAKESPEARE (in astonishment)—My Lord!

LADY YLVERTON—My Lady.

SHAKESPEARE—One is two.

LADY YLVERTON (laughing)—Or two is Countess Ylverton.

SHAKESPEARE—I understand.

LADY YLVERTON—Good Will,—sweet Will,—that is all,—that is more than all,—you understand.

CURTAIN

ACT III

The Flower Girl of Blackfriars

SCENE I.—(A playhouse, The Blackfriars, Blackfriars. On right a raised stage, where the Players are arranged for a production of Henry IV. It is surrounded by the balconies in the old Inn way. Before this seats of the pit, the outer ones exposed to the sky. In the background, Thames—stairs, the Thames, and towers and roofs beyond the river. Barges are seen passing on the river. Spectators are beginning to gather for the Play,—some fops taking their seats at the edge of the stage. There is an apple and orange girl, and a Flower Girl. Shakespeare and Burbage are talking on the stage. In the audience are Julia and Sir Robin.)

JULIA—So she has divorced Lord Wimbledon.

SIR ROBIN—With whom she never lived. She is the Queen's favourite; the Countess Ylverton's whim,—the Countess Ylverton's wish,—seems Elizabeth's law to-day. But what have we here?

(Lady Ylverton, attired in blue, with a basket of roses on her arm, followed by Bartholomew, Patch, and Darby in her livery.)

THE FLOWER GIRL (observing her, springs toward her)—She would strip me of gallants.

(A tumult. The Flower Girl, followed by a crowd, tips over Lady Ylverton's rose basket. Shakespeare leaps from the stage. The crowd separates before him. He picks up the roses.)

SHAKESPEARE (restoring the roses to the basket)—Your merchandise.

LADY YLVERTON (extending a purse)—Take this purse to Doll (extending Shakespeare a rose.) For good courtesy, sir, a rose as red as ever Lancaster's, and I find no white for the war.

BURBAGE (from the stage)—Your eyes and ears for the pomp of England, and Harry on Gadshill!

A PLAYER (recognizing Lady Ylverton)—All hail our Gracious Patroness, Ino, Countess Ylverton and Severn,—the Lady of ourselves,—the Black Friars.

THE CROWD—The Lady of the Black Friars!

LADY YLVERTON (advancing, and addressing the players)—The play is my mood and my pleasure. So I do not demean myself by coming here a-playing, as your servant,—as your flower girl. Let the great know that the great shall find England's glory, her Play. Ah, I have stopped the Play. I must be gone. My thanks, Master Shakespeare (who has given Doll, the Flower Girl, the purse.) To you, Gentlemen, may you have fewer hisses, and more heartfelt applause. Let all folk know that of a day Countess Ylverton came as Flower Girl to the Blackfriars. I wish you well. I'll stop you no longer. And to Her Majesty who desires my opinion of certain plays, for her information, I will say what I may say. Adieu, my friends of the Play.

THE PLAYERS—The Lady of the Play! Our most Gracious Patroness the Lady of the Black Friars!

(Lady Ylverton throws her blue cloak over her face and hair, and goes out toward Thames stairs, followed by Darby and Patch. At the stairs she takes a barge. Bartholomew, her page, remaining behind, approaches Sir Robin.)

BARTHOLOMEW (to Sir Robin)—You are friend of another who has made verses My Lady delight in?

SIR ROBIN—All of that.

BARTHOLOMEW—All of that. Could not I play a maid in some play?

SIR ROBIN—That you might.

BARTHOLOMEW—I would please My Lady who is mad over mad capering, and who believes Dan Cupid a poet instead of a soldier and nobleman,—who needs must run away,—needs must fall in love,—not with those that love her, but with some verse-maker,—whose true love is the Moon,—that is to say Diana, who leads her lovers a cold dance. Now she wills you to fetch this same Master Shakespeare,—a plain man to me,—who like you, sir, have seen the noblest gallants,—and with you, because two gentlemen defend a Lady, and one bewrays her.

SIR ROBIN (calling to Shakespeare)—Master Will, a Lady so high that she dares to masquerade to attract your eye, sends this word by her page:—"Come, Will, your heart I would see."

SHAKESPEARE—It is well to go in company, and you are as honest and indiscreet as men are made, Sir Robin.

(Following Bartholomew they go out toward Thames stairs, while the audience direct all their attention to the mimic stage where the first act of Henry IV. is opening.)

CURTAIN

ACT IV

The Queen's Poet

SCENE I.—(The interior, as in Act II, Ylverton House, Strand. The Queen and Lady Ylverton reading to her. A lute and books on a table. Enter, rear, Bartholomew with Shakespeare and Sir Robin.)

THE QUEEN (to Shakespeare)—This Lady loves you well,—a mad-cap, well-read in Greece and Rome,—and she assures me that none writes better as a player of Lord Hunsdon's players than yourself.

LADY YLVERTON—And that is yourself,—yes, yourself.

THE QUEEN—I may not knight you; for there are stern lords who would hold the Queen a politician. Nor would I spoil so able a poet,—as I hold you. For I know you,—your Queen reads the books that please her Londoners. (And three of yours I have censured.) Know you, sir, I'd not spoil so good a poet. For good poets are as children, and will devour too many sweets. But what may I do for you?

SHAKESPEARE (after a moment)—I owe My Lord of Southampton some thousands of pounds, Madam. Not that His Lordship urges me.

THE QUEEN (taking a ruby from her finger)—Lord Southampton is rich and able. Let that suffice. (She hesitates, and then in a low voice) There was once a Lady and Queen of this realm,—who suffered greatly. Could you make a play of Queen Anne, my Mother?

SHAKESPEARE—I cannot write, Madam.

THE QUEEN (with light laughter)—You mean that I, displeased, might have your head, or that the subject trembles in you. Ah, but you will? (Shakespeare is silent.) Amuse and teach these Londoners. But let no man know you have had speech with your Queen.

LADY YLVERTON—But with me, Madam.

THE QUEEN—But with you, as light as his own Italy.

LADY YLVERTON—As earnest, Madam. His Italy is tragical.

THE QUEEN—Then I will venture that Master Shakespeare loves no woman but the good wife in Stratford.

SHAKESPEARE—All women, Madam, and the Queen of England.

LADY YLVERTON (taking the lute from the table, sings to it.)

*Sing of the World.
And sing of the Song.
Sing of the men;
And sing of the wrong.
Love is a fineness.
Love is a niceness.
Love is a feather.
Love is like weather.
Oh, but I love none.
Yet shall I love some.*

THE QUEEN (rising and to Sir Robin)—Sir Robin, attend me to my coach! Fare thee well, Master Shakespeare. Lady, I crave your presence at Court in two hours.

(Lady Ylverton curtesies. The Queen goes out accompanied by Sir Robin.)

SHAKESPEARE—Oh, Lady, you have brought me speech with Her Majesty!

LADY YLVERTON—I? Why should it be I? Who love you?

SHAKESPEARE (as if in revery)—I know not,—I know not.

LADY YLVERTON—Your play,—your verse,—your lines,—your wit,—yourself. Go, sir! I am a-tired,—as weary as Mariana in the Moated-Grange. The World is fair to young maids,—and lovers “near-her-heart” somewhere near. But you, Shakespeare, Poet of a Play, shall love and sigh for me another day. Nor no day at all. But I like you well, sir. And now,—good-day. Bartholomew, our guest will have the door.

(Bartholomew at the door.)

CURTAIN

ACT V

The Roses. How Lady Ylverton Came to Stratford Church.

SCENE I.—(The interior Stratford Church. An opening in the flagging where Shakespeare has been buried. Some players,—some rustics, and Sir Robin.)

FIRST RUSTIC—He was a mighty man in Lunnon.

SECOND RUSTIC—I hold this play-book making be impious.

FIRST RUSTIC—He, most probable, has gone to Hell.

SECOND RUSTIC—Yet was he a good neighbour in Stratford,—that may excuse him.

(Enter an old woman, leaning on a long thorn staff, taller than she is. She approaches the opening in the flagging.)

OLD WOMAN—But he is not here.

SIR ROBIN (suddenly turning)—And where is he?

OLD WOMAN (in a sweet, strong voice)—With the fairies of England, where he ever is.

(A sudden darkening of the church,—thunder and lightning. The storm passes as suddenly as it came. The church lights up, and the yellow sun enters the chancel. But the old woman on the thorn staff is gone.)

FIRST RUSTIC—The old woman departed sudden.

SECOND RUSTIC—Hush, mon, she be the Queen of fairies,—my Grandsire saw her once.

(Enter the Lady Ylverton,—as if from the saddle,—her arms filled with roses. Bartholomew follows, as if from the saddle. She perceives Sir Robin and addresses him.)

LADY YLVERTON—Where is he?

SIR ROBIN (dully)—In the church.

LADY YLVERTON—Or under the church.

(She leans forward over the open flagging. Then kneels on her knees over it. She drops a rose into the opening.)

LADY Ylverton—*This for Thyself. This (dropping another rose) for the Play. And this (dropping another rose) for Love,—who is a god.*

A SONG:

*He was of Venus' Players and the Sun's
Who pass in chariots from the Sun to Earth.*

CURTAIN

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